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SUBJECT: SERBIA: FY2010 BIOTECH OUTREACH PROPOSAL

REF: STATE 122732; 09 BELGRADE 637

Summary

¶1. In response to reftel call for proposals, post requests \$19,060 in EEB biotech outreach funds for programs that will educate consumers, media, farmers, academics and policy makers about the benefits of agricultural biotechnology and encourage the GoS to fulfill its promise to change a restrictive, non-WTO compliant law prohibiting genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The Agriculture Ministry has requested U.S. technical assistance to bring the law into conformity with WTO standards; however, public awareness is essential if Serbia is to find the political will to change its current protectionist law. Post's proposal for EEB funds will complement and expand upon already allocated Public Diplomacy resources. The proposed programs would be undertaken in close coordination with ECON, PD and FAS to generate media attention and public awareness of the merits of biotechnology in Serbia. In addition, by increasing efforts in Serbia, the U.S. would garner a potential future EU member as an ally with common interests and shared beliefs to combat the EU's anti-GMO position in the years ahead. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

¶2. In May 2009, Serbia's parliament adopted a restrictive Genetically Modified Organisms Law, which is non-WTO compliant (Ref B). The law was designed to protect the domestic soybean meal industry. By prohibiting commercial cultivation of biotech products, and trade of biotech and biotech derivative products, the law has virtually stopped biotechnology cultivation and trade. Economics Minister Mladjan Dinkic said he would push for amendments to the law during 2009; however, this has not occurred. In addition, Agriculture Minister Sasa Dragan asked for U.S. assistance in preparing the necessary revisions to the legislation. Post wishes to use this momentum and requests funds to help secure public awareness and support.

POST'S CURRENT AND PREVIOUS BIOTECH EFFORTS

¶3. Post already allocates AEECA (formerly SEED) funds towards biotech outreach. The majority of these efforts have been directed toward the scientific community. For example, Serbia's Agriculture Ministry and the National Biosafety Committee work with USDA to strengthen Serbia's decision-making process and implement a transparent, practical regulatory framework for agriculture biotechnology. USDA also assists in developing Serbia's capacities in the research and regulations of agricultural biotechnology. USDA/OCBD have trained and helped Serbian participants pursue biotech strategies and are assisting Serbian scientists to design and conduct field trials of genetically modified crops. In FY 2008/09, USDA technical assistance was targeted at training activities related to the Institutional Biosafety Committee operation, risk assessment for commercial approval of transgenic plants, collaborative efforts of education and training programs that link bio-safety to other biodiversity, environmental and health issues.

PROPOSED BIOTECH STRATEGY

¶4. Post proposes to expand its efforts through a broad public educational outreach campaign. The Serbian public does not have firmly formed opinions on biotech food and other biotech issues. Accordingly, Post's outreach initiative aims to generate awareness and discussion about biotechnology, create positive public opinion, and provide information about agricultural biotechnology to both the media and everyday consumers. Part of the educational campaign will target key opinion leaders in the following fields: media, government officials, consumers, farmers, environment, food industry, agriculture schools and faculties, and targeted secondary cities in agricultural regions, in order to counter misconceptions and create a more favorable environment for pro-biotech policies. They will learn about scientific, research and regulatory processes involved in agricultural biotechnology as well as the benefits for Serbia. Gaining key opinion leaders' support will help increase the public's awareness and trust in foods derived from GMO products. We will continue to engage with key GoS policy makers to change their anti-biotech position, to encourage in creating more pro-biotech legislation and to provide for them tools to be able to educate their own population. The proposed program builds on existing contacts, local expertise on USDA/FAS matching resources.

PROJECTED PLAN FOR FY 2010

¶5. Post intends to bring two expert speakers to Serbia for a series of seminars, workshops, discussion groups, representational and press events - to inform audiences of the merits of biotechnology. Post would use AEECA funded U.S. Speaker funds, managed through the Public Diplomacy section and the Bureau of International Informational Programs (IIP), to nominate two biotech speakers for seminars in Belgrade and secondary cities in Vojvodina and central Serbia. Target audiences would include local farmers association, officials, commercial groups, consumer groups, researchers, academics, National Biosafety Committee members and the media. Post would use one speaker with an academic and research background to address the growing acceptance of biotech worldwide, the implications of the favorable WTO ruling, and the positive safety

and environmental implications of biotechnology. The second speaker, likely a farmer or seed association representative, would discuss the commercial and practical advantage. This combination of speakers would resonate with both urban policy makers and rural audiences.

¶6. Post also proposes general presentations on agriculture biotechnology in three agriculture schools and faculties in Serbia in order to educate students. These presentations would build on programs initiated last year through Community Connections.

BUDGET PROPOSAL FOR EEB FUNDING

¶7. To supplement IIP programming, Post is soliciting proposed EEB funding for: additional event costs in order to conduct the seminars; educational materials; and, to purchase a documentary on agricultural biotechnology and to subtitle it in Serbian.

Event Costs: Additional costs for the rental of space, local transportation and lodging for organizers of the proposed seminars.

Educational Materials: To complement the IIP funded seminars, presentations and media events, English language publications on the benefits of biotechnology will be translated into Serbian.

Documentary: Post would acquire the rights to a professional-quality documentary on agricultural biotechnology and have it subtitled in Serbian. A documentary would be a valuable, reusable resource that could be used at schools, universities, and appropriate local and national television channels.

¶8. Cost estimates for these EEB funded events, materials and documentary are as follows:

Event Costs:

- transportation, lodging, M&IE for organizers during planning/organizing stages: \$2,000
- rental rooms and conference packages: \$500/day x 3 = \$1,500
- funding lodging M&IE for two local biotech speakers: \$200 x 5 = \$1,000
- local transportation: \$800 x 2 = \$ 1,600
- communication costs: \$3,000

Materials:

- reproduction costs for materials to be distributed to

participants: \$8 x 3 events x 40 participants = \$960

- translation and reproduction of materials into Serbian language: \$3,000

Documentary:

- documentary film translation and broadcasting rights: \$6,000

TOTAL AMOUNT REQUESTED FOR FY2010: \$19,060

19. Post believes a strong push for public education regarding agricultural biotechnology is timely and would build momentum for changing Serbia's biotech/GMO laws. Post's point of contact for this initiative is Economic Officer Susan McFee (mcfeesn@state.gov).

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